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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, September 17, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Pot-Luck School Lunches." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Sometimes it takes a long time and a lot of working and urging and campaigning generally to put a good idea across. That's the way with the hot-school-lunch idea. Years ago people interested in the welfare of our future citizens began talking about the need of warm, nourishing food for children who must eat at school. Long ago we began hearing about the dangers to growing bodies of going hungry or being ill-fed for the day's work.

In recent years, in spite of the depression, this good idea seems to be "taking" at last. Every state in the Union has gradually been getting the idea. And even some of the poorest communities have managed to provide a hot lunch at the school each noon. The cooperation and interest of parents and teachers and the children themselves has been the secret of putting this plan over successfully -- and economically.

Mrs. Rowena Schmidt Carpenter at the Bureau of Home Economics, who is especially interested in good school lunches, showed me a letter from a lady in Virginia telling of the way the school in her town serves lunches to its children. I'd like to read you part of this letter. It begins: "Dear Mrs. Carpenter: I think the plan which a teacher in our town found for serving free soup to her pupils at noon is too good not to pass on to others. The school is at Chesterbrook, Virginia, and has about fifty-five pupils enrolled. Interested parents donated an oil-stove and a five-gallon kettle. Then the teacher asked the children to bring each day anything they could from home to use in making soup. They brought potatoes, carrots, rice, beans, onions, parsley, celery, turnips, home-canned tomatoes, seasoning -- anything the home could spare. When there is a supply of fresh vegetables, the teacher makes vegetable soup. On other days the children have bean soup, or potato soup or split pea soup. Each day the youngsters themselves see that the food bin is replenished.

"Some of the older girls often take home the vegetables to prepare them for school the next day, so that too much school time won't be used in cooking.

"Each child furnishes and washes his own bowl and spoon. He places these on his desk at noon recess. Then while he is washing his hands, two pupils, who are appointed 'waiters' for the day, serve the soup to each bowl. Children bring their own bread and crackers and other food in their lunch boxes.

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"It is no unusual sight to see a husky growing boy finish six bowls of school soup, in addition to what he brings from home. Seldom is there a drop left in the kettle out of the gallons made every day. Many parents have become enthusiastic and ask to be notified whenever the teacher wants a soup-bone or some other perishable ingredient.

"Since this school-soup plan went into effect the attendance has been better than in years."

Well, there's one way of helping out the school children of the town at little expense.

Schools in other places have improved on this pot-luck idea by planning the hot dish in advance. Each Thursday the teacher makes out a list of the hot dishes for the coming week and the foods that will be needed for it. The children take the list home and confer with their mothers and then "sign up" for the foods they will bring. Then, the mothers at home can plan the rest of the child's lunch around the hot lunch she knows he is going to have.

Perhaps you would like to hear just which hot dishes have been particularly successful for school use. Well, naturally, those that are low in cost, easy to prepare and serve, and nourishing. As most schools have only little oil stoves without an oven to cook on, the hot dish is usually one of the top-stove variety.

Among the soups, milk and vegetable mixtures fill the qualifications well. When fresh milk is hard to have on hand at school, these dishes can be made often with canned or powdered milk. Cream of mixed vegetable soup is a good dish for using a collection of fresh vegetables that the children have brought from home. Cream of corn soup makes a delicious, nourishing, economy soup. Then there is quick turnip soup made with milk; oatmeal and potato soup; split pea soup and other milk soups made with tomatoes, cabbage, carrot, spinach, celery, onion and peanut butter. Chowders made with milk also fill the hot-dish bill nicely. There's fish chowder, meat chowder, corn chowder and whole wheat chowder. With bread and if possible fruit, the children have a satisfying, well balanced meal.

Other dishes which are almost a meal in themselves are Spanish rice; tomato rabbit; corn rabbit; tomato-corn-and-cheese on toast; creamed canned salmon; creamed chipped beef; creamed vegetables or vegetables and meat. These hot combinations are just as good served on crisp crackers as toast. And you can always make them more nourishing by adding some grated cheese.

Raw shredded cabbage and carrot or turnip sticks are cheap and appetizing additions when the hot dish is a soup or a chowder or anything in cream sauce.

If you are helping school-lunch work in your community, or if you are interested in it, you are welcome to write for further suggestions to the Bureau of Home Economics at Washington, D. C. The suggestions are free, of course.

